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General Assembly

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Official Records

18th plenary meeting
Thursday, 22 September 2011, 7 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Al-Nasser ..... (Qatar)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Archondo (Plurinational State of Bolivia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 8.20 p.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Kevin Rudd, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia.

Mr. Rudd (Australia): Since we last gathered in this great Assembly one year ago, we have witnessed developments of historic dimensions. There has been democratic protest and democratic reform across the Arab world, as we discovered afresh that freedom is the right of all, not just of the few. Also, a global economic crisis is rolling on, as we enter a new and dangerous period that threatens the jobs and livelihoods of working people everywhere.

And while rarely making the front pages, the other great global challenges that have been with us now for too many years continue their almost alarmingly silent advance — challenges of grinding poverty, environmental degradation, the continued proliferation of nuclear weapons, the enhancement of human rights, all of which compete for attention on an already crowded international agenda.

Our global institutions are struggling to comprehend, let alone effectively respond to, this vast array of challenges that now confront us — challenges that arise as the inevitable consequence of what we now simply call globalization. Put simply, the dilemma is this: the challenges we face are increasingly global while the institutions at our disposal are still primarily national. Or put more crudely, for those engaged in democratic politics, the answers may lie abroad, but all the votes lie at home.

Three years ago, when I first spoke at this podium, I spoke of the storm clouds gathering across the global economy. It seemed as if we were in free fall as we all stared into the abyss, with the very real possibility of a second global depression in a century. Through coordinated intervention in 2009, we broke the fall. Yet three years on, the crisis in the global economy continues, still with a capacity to engulf us all. Recovery is stalling. Unemployment is rising. Confidence is waning. There are growing concerns over sovereign debt levels, and there are concerns also over the national and international political will to deal with these challenges.

This week, the International Monetary Fund issued a stark warning for the global economy, highlighting that we have entered a new and dangerous phase. So what then is to be done?

First, reforms to the financial system should be implemented and taxpayers should no longer be asked to bail out the irresponsible behaviour of particular financial institutions. Secondly, all major economies need to find a credible path back to surplus over time, consistent with the Group of Twenty's Framework for Strong, Sustainable and Balanced Growth. Thirdly, we

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must prevent a further outbreak of protectionism and we must conclude Doha, as history will condemn us if we repeat the job-destroying protectionism of the 1930s that transformed a financial crisis into a full-blown depression.

Fourthly, for international trade to grow and Chinese domestic demand to make a greater contribution to growth in economies around the world, we must also see currency reform, particularly with the appreciation of the Chinese yuan. And finally, we must with clarity of leadership and resolution of purpose define and deliver a range of other new innovative drivers of global growth. These include innovative public-private financing for the new infrastructure revolution needed for power, water, agriculture, transport and communications. The jobs potential for the green energy revolution must be fully harvested by carbon pricing, and women and youth must participate fully in the economies of the developed and the developing world.

These are not just useful social policies. These are not just useful environmental policies. They are now necessary economic policies to generate the next missing increment of global economic growth. What is required, therefore, is global and national political leadership capable of looking beyond the next electoral cycle — to look to the long term over the short term, to look to the strategic rather than the tactical, and to look to the necessary over the urgent.

Over the course of the last decade, we have seen an acceleration of the shift of economic power to Asia marking Asia's re-emergence as the centre of global economic gravity after an interruption of more than 200 years. In the year 2000, China was a mere 3.7 per cent of global GDP and India was less than half that. By 2030, they will account for more than 20 per cent of global GDP, and that will rise further. Asian countries held 16.6 per cent of global foreign exchange reserves in 2001. Now they hold 39 per cent.

Therefore, what happens in Asia is now of fundamental relevance to the world, not just to the region itself. Asian economic growth has been overwhelmingly good for the global economy.

But Asia has also seen an exponential increase in military expenditure. Over the last 20 years military expenditure in East Asia grew by nearly 150 per cent. During the same period the United States' military expenditure grew by 36 per cent. Asia, with its many unresolved territorial disputes and military tensions, has become the new global arms bazaar.

One of the big spenders, despite the poverty afflicting its population, is North Korea. North Korea's nuclear weapons programme and its long-range missile programme represent a direct threat to the security of our region, including Australia.

To deal adequately with those and other security challenges in Asia, we need strong regional institutional architecture, as a complement to the United Nations, to help build transparency, cooperation and, in time, a sense of common security in our region.

For that reason, Australia has promoted the concept of an Asia-Pacific community. Collectively, regional countries now have an opportunity to realize the idea of such a community through the expanded East Asia Summit (EAS), which for the first time this year will include the Presidents of the United States and of the Russian Federation. Over time, a stronger EAS can promote the type of rules-based order regionally for which the United Nations strives globally. This task is critical to avoid damaging strategic miscalculation in the Asia-Pacific region, which would also undermine global economic growth.

I say again: what happens in Asia now matters not just for Asia, itself, but for the world.

In Australia's more immediate region in the South Pacific, we are bound together by the common bonds of democracy and the responsibility we all have to develop those economies and protect their natural environment.

We thank the Secretary-General for his visit to the Pacific Islands Forum — the first ever by a United Nations Secretary-General. His commitment to our region is an important signal of the international community's interests in the Pacific's prosperity, its sustainability and its democracy.

Global events since the last session of the General Assembly have highlighted that the human cry for freedom and for democracy is both indivisible and universal. Australia stands with the rest of the international community in applauding the courage of those citizens seeking what is naturally theirs in Tunisia, in Egypt, in Libya, and now in Syria.

In Egypt, we are now supporting improved dry land farming and assistance with urban employment

programmes as Egypt moves to critical parliamentary and presidential elections. In Tunisia, we are providing agricultural and electoral assistance. In Libya, Australia was among the first to campaign internationally for a no-fly zone to protect civilians at a time when Al-Qadhafi seemed destined for victory. We are proud of the fact that since the Libya conflict began, Australia stands across the world as the third largest humanitarian donor to the long-suffering people of Libya. We also stand ready to assist with institution-building in the new Libya of the future.

What challenges us now is the ongoing brutality in Syria. The Syrian regime should heed the lessons of Libya. We call on Bashar Al-Assad to step down now, for political reform to begin now, and for the international community to intensify its pressure on Damascus to respond to the voices of the Syrian people demanding their legitimate freedom.

Twelve months ago, we had no expectation of change in Egypt, Tunisia or Libya. But we did hope to see progress in the historic process to bring permanent peace to the peoples of Israel and Palestine. Sadly, there has been no progress. Australia remains committed to a negotiated two-State solution that allows a secure and independent Israel to live side by side with a secure and independent Palestinian State.

Over the past 10 months I have travelled three times to both Jerusalem and Ramallah, where I have met on each occasion with Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas. I have urged both parties to engage in direct negotiations. I have argued that they should be held on the basis of the 1967 boundaries plus appropriate land swaps. I have argued that the remaining final status issues — the right to return, the status of Jerusalem, the Holy Sites and the provision of external security — be resolved through such direct negotiations.

My fear is that if we do not see these matters concluded in the near term, the rapidly changing geo-politics of the region will make the prospects of a lasting settlement remote. We have already seen tension between Israel and Egypt. We have already seen the fracturing of the relationship between Israel and Turkey. We do not know how long the current framework of the Arab Peace Plan will remain on the table. We are fearful of a further intifada of the type we have seen before.

As a friend of Israel, we are fearful that in the absence of a negotiated settlement, Israel's security situation will deteriorate rapidly in the year ahead. As a friend of the Palestinian people, we believe that the time has come for direct negotiations to establish a Palestinian State, one which also guarantees the security of Israel. If we fail to achieve this, I fear the gravity of the consequences as the ground continues to change across the wider Middle East. I note also that these views have been reflected today by the former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

Australia therefore urges both parties to seize the day and to shape the future of a new Middle East. We await the outcome from the weeks that lie ahead in New York, before framing our response to any particular resolution before the United Nations.

Terrorism is the enemy of all civilized peoples. A decade since 9/11, terrorism still casts a deep shadow over the security and safety of our citizens. Many of Australia's finest have lost their lives in the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan. Australia will stay the course in Afghanistan, because we refuse to yield to terrorism.

While terrorism threatens thousands, nuclear proliferation threatens millions. Australia remains vitally committed to the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world and is active to that end. That is why we have established with Japan the Non-proliferation and Disarmament Initiative — the NPDI — to take forward the agenda of the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

As we speak in this Assembly, we should remind ourselves that a fifth of humanity lives in grinding poverty. The scale of the challenge has been graphically demonstrated by this year's devastating drought in the Horn of Africa. I witnessed how bad things are when I visited the affected areas in July. Australia has given almost US$ 100 million. We are proud to be the fourth largest international donor to that crisis. We will continue to give.

Last year, we gathered to see how we were tracking on our collective pledge to lift a billion people out of poverty by 2015. The report card was very poor. Most of the Millennium Development Goals are unlikely to be achieved. Australia has doubled its official development assistance (ODA) budget over the past five years, and we are on track to double it again

by 2015. Based on available data, that would make Australia's ODA budget the sixth largest in the world.

The international community must get behind both regional and global efforts to meet the strategic need for food security. With a forecast global population of 9.3 billion by 2050, an estimated increase of 70 per cent in global food production will be needed to feed the world.

In food security, we should also be blunt. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is failing fully to meet its mandate to the poor of the world. Under its new management, FAO needs to set clear priorities for the future and eliminate the unsustainable administrative overheads it has long tolerated. If FAO does not do so, Australia will comprehensively review its development funding for FAO under our new aid effectiveness criteria.

Food is fundamental to development. So too is the right to education. All of the world's children must be given a chance at life that is good for them and good for their economies. For that reason, and learning from both the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and the GAVI Alliance, Australia believes that the time has come for the international community to consider developing a new public-private institution with an explicit mandate for school education.

At present, this task is shared between the World Bank, UNICEF and UNESCO, with negligible private sector buy-in. We should consider, therefore, a new global fund for education that would concentrate exclusively on the immediate task of getting nearly 70 million children into schools by 2015. Australia would consider contributing substantially to such an institution to bring about real results at a rate as rapid as possible. I challenge education donors, current and potential, to join such a fund.

In supporting the world's most vulnerable peoples, we also recognize the world's estimated 370 million indigenous peoples, spread across 90 of the 193 United Nations Member States. They remain among the most marginalized and disadvantaged in the world, including in our country, Australia. That is why the Australian Government has reached beyond the apology to the Stolen Generations to pursue constitutional recognition for our First Peoples. And we are committed to closing the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.

Our hope of answering the development challenges of the world is inextricably linked to the health of the planet itself. The planet ultimately can bear only so much. Scientists tell us that there are planetary boundaries beyond which we should not venture — in climate change, biodiversity loss, stratospheric ozone depletion, chemical pollution, ocean acidification and the depletion of freshwater reserves. It is not just a matter of atmospheric limits, but of the oceans as well.

Next year at Rio the international community will have the opportunity to act decisively to protect a planet now in stress, just as we need to take effective global action on climate change. Climate change will not go away, even if some choose the easy path of simply hiding their heads in the sand. If we do that, our children and theirs will never forgive us — nor should they.

As the global community, we face challenges of historic consequence — to our global economy, to global security, to the basic freedoms of all peoples, to our global environment, to the security of our citizens, to our obligation to the world's poor and to our planetary boundaries themselves.

While so many challenges lie before us, the past year has proven that when the international community does act collectively and decisively, we can deliver — as we have seen in the decisions of the Security Council on Libya and Côte d'Ivoire. But to be effective, this parliament of humankind, these United Nations, must continue to summon the political will of Member States to make our global institutions work. Otherwise, we will become a clanging gong, full of sound and sentiment, but ultimately symbolizing nothing.

When Secretary-General Ban came to Australia two weeks ago, he saw a country that values the rules-based system that the United Nations embodies. Australia today is a middle Power with global interests, animated by deep values of freedom and a fair go for all. This is the Australia we are proud of in its work in the world. This is the Australia that believes in the principles of good international citizenship. This is the Australia that rolls up its sleeves, the Australia that by nature wants to pitch in, the Australia that wants to make a difference for the betterment of all humankind.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Zalmai Rassoul, Minister

for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Mr. Rassoul (Afghanistan): I am honoured to be here to read the statement of my President, His Excellency Hâmid Karzai, who had to return from New York to Kabul on an urgent basis, following the tragic assassination, through a terrorist plot, of Afghanistan's former President and Chairman of the High Peace Council, Mr. Burhanuddin Rabbani.

The President's message begins:

"It is a great honour to address the General Assembly at this year's session, although I regret that I am unable to do so in person. I was here in New York the day before yesterday and had looked forward to attending this important session of the Assembly. I had to return to Kabul after the tragic news of the martyrdom of former President and Chairman of the Afghan High Peace Council, Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani. He was assassinated in a cowardly terrorist plot by the enemies of peace in our country.

"As I speak, the Afghan nation is mourning the loss not only of a valued and deeply respected national figure, but a champion of peace who worked tirelessly, up to the last moment of his distinguished life, for peace in his country. On behalf of the Afghan people, I am grateful for the messages of condolences expressed by leaders around the world at this terrible national loss in Afghanistan.

"As the single largest gathering of nations, the Assembly is the highest manifestation of the plurality of our world. It is also the most solemn opportunity we have, once a year, to bring to global attention our national concerns and to issues that are, in our view, of concern to the wider world.

"Over the past year, the world saw not only political volatility of historic proportions in the Middle East, but also an unabated global economic crisis, huge increases in the prices of food and energy and enormous devastation wrought by natural disasters. Most countries around the world have seen aggravated conditions of life for their peoples, and for many others the future looks continuously bleak. In short, we live in times of uncertainty and crisis, and it is at times like these that international cooperation gains true relevance and meaning.

"Ten days ago, this very city marked the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. On behalf of the people of Afghanistan, who have experienced the scourge of terrorism in its worst imaginable form, I pay homage and respect to the memory of the 9/11 tragedy and commiserate with the people of the United States for their sense of loss, which this anniversary has rekindled.

"On this occasion, I urge the Assembly to also reflect on the millions of lives around the world that were touched by terror and violence before 9/11 and those that have been lost to terrorist violence over the 10 years since.

"My country, Afghanistan, has suffered the most, but many — from Pakistan to India, Iraq, Europe and many others around the world — have fallen victim to this modern-day enemy of peace. I urge the Assembly to also honour the sacrifices many nations have made in the fight against terrorism around the world. Above all, however, I ask that we pause and take stock of where we are 10 years after the world was shaken into an unprecedented resolve to act in the face of a common enemy.

"Later this year, Afghanistan will also mark the anniversary of 10 years of the new political era heralded by the end of the Taliban rule and characterized by the beginning of a journey towards a peaceful, prosperous and democratic way of life. There is so much that we have to celebrate in the enormous achievements we have had, with the solidarity and generous help of the international community. These 10 years have been a truly unique chapter in the history of our ancient country.

"Grasping the opportunity, we took bold steps to reunite the country after decades of strife and violence, laying the foundations of a young democracy. Our social and economic accomplishments are phenomenal, greater by comparison than in any other period in our country's history. Never before have the Afghan people enjoyed comparable access to education and health or seen a greater development of infrastructure across the country.

"Regrettably, the sense of gratitude and pride we feel at our achievements is tempered by the absence of a key ingredient of any country's development, namely security. Despite the Afghan people's sincere embrace of the international fight against terrorism and the immeasurable sacrifices made on this path, we have yet to reap the rewards of experiencing a life free from violence and terror.

"We Afghans are proud to have partnered, over the past 10 years, with the world's struggle against terrorism. While together we have fought and crushed extremists in some of their long-held strongholds, elsewhere they have continued to thrive. Today, we see a worrying trend towards increased radicalization of the youth. Al-Qaida, despite the elimination of its leaders, remains active in the region, and the Taliban militancy maintains its deadly spectre over my country. Both continue to receive sanctuary and support in the region, which keeps them alive. This sanctuary problem is, without a doubt, the Achilles' heel of this war.

"To the extent that international terrorism and extremism remain real threats to international security, peace will remain mortgaged to the success of the fight in the region. To succeed, however, we must fundamentally review and adjust our approaches in this fight. It is urgent that we focus our strategy to make our collective struggle more objective and results-oriented. Our enemy must not be defined by a selective treatment of the geography to which we have access, but by an assessment of the threat it poses, regardless of where it may be based.

"The Afghan people remain ardent supporters of the fight against international terrorism, despite having suffered unspeakable losses in this endeavour. However, we fail to see the efficacy of the fight in which ordinary citizens bear the brunt while terrorist sanctuaries remain untouched, far away from the towns and villages of Afghanistan. The continued credibility of the fight will depend above all on taking its focus to where terrorism originates.

"On the other hand, when it comes to the Taliban insurgency, we do not see military action as the only solution. In our eager quest for restoring peace to the lives of our people, we have extended a hand of peace and reconciliation to all those Afghans who have had reason to remain outside the boundaries of the current political process in Afghanistan.

"Led until now by the late Mr. Rabbani, who is tragically no longer among us, through the High Peace Council, and supported by our partners from the international community, the peace process is a comprehensive effort. It covers the reintegration of armed combatants into dignified civilian life and reconciles the leadership of the Taliban.

"The reconciliation policy is based on our commitment to make the political process more inclusive and to provide a genuine and acceptable alternative to violence for all Taliban and other militant leaders, most of whom are currently based outside Afghanistan. Those leaders are welcome to return home and play their proper role in Afghan politics and Government — provided that they break ties with Al-Qaida, give up violent activities and accept the Afghan Constitution. Clearly, without sincere cooperation from regional and international partners, notably the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, this strategy will not succeed.

"The year 2011 is a crucial year for Afghanistan. The most important development for our country was the commencement of the transition process last July. This process will see the complete transfer of security responsibility from international forces to Afghans by the end of 2014. With the completion of the transition process, we Afghans and our international partners will achieve the most important strategic goal of our 10-year partnership: the emergence of a sovereign Afghanistan that is self-reliant and is the peaceful home of all Afghans, an Afghanistan that is at peace and lives in peace with the rest of the world.

"Needless to say, the success of the transition process depends on, besides the demand and solid resolve of the Afghan people, the continued support of the international community. The role of our NATO partners, particularly in terms of the capacity development of our security institutions, will be vital.

"On the other hand, transition is not just limited to security. Indeed, while transition is both desirable and inevitable, the economic effect of the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan needs to be managed carefully. In other words, for Afghanistan to become truly self-reliant, apart from the security transition, we will need a comprehensive economic transition. That transition will take much longer than the security transition and will require the continuation of steadfast support on the part of our international partners beyond 2014.

"In this context, we look forward to the much awaited International Conference on Afghanistan, to be held in Bonn, Germany, on 5 December 2011. Hosted by Germany and chaired by Afghanistan, the Bonn conference will be an opportunity for us to brief our international partners about the major Compact accomplishments of the past 10 years, and in particular about the progress of the Transition and reconciliation processes.

"Most importantly, at Bonn we will call for continued commitment of the international community to assist Afghanistan in the post-2014 period, after the foreign military presence on Afghanistan soil comes to an end. To that end, we will share our vision for the next 10 years — the vision of developing Afghanistan into a stable country, a functioning democracy and a prospering economy. As a country at the centre of an emerging 'new silk road', Afghanistan can become a regional hub for trade and transit. This vision is worth all the efforts we Afghans can muster, as well as all the support we can get from the international community.

"As a framework for long-term partnership, we will call for a new paradigm of cooperation between Afghanistan and our friends and partners. The strategic partnership that we are currently negotiating with the United States and other partners, including the European Union, will be a model for the kind of enduring and comprehensive partnership we wish to have with members of the international community. Such partnerships will help guarantee Afghanistan's security and stability, as well as assist our future economic development. I emphasize that neither our strategic partnership with the United States, nor any other partnerships we will forge in the future, will be a threat to our neighbours or to any other country.

"I also emphasize that in the context of these future partnerships, the principle of Afghan sovereignty and the centrality of the Afghan State must be given due credence; the manner of our continued partnership should conform to the requirements of a sovereign Afghanistan. As an important step in this direction, all the parallel structures created by the international community, be it in the security, governance or development arenas, must be removed to make space for the emergence of genuine and capable indigenous institutions.

"In particular, the role of the United Nations in Afghanistan must be adjusted to the requirements of Afghan sovereignty. I welcome the review of the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, as authorized by the Secretary-General. In the months ahead, we look forward to participating in this review and to its positive conclusion.

"On the subject of regional cooperation, we are currently working closely with Afghanistan's old friend and brother, the Republic of Turkey, towards a regional conference to be held in Istanbul on 2 November 2011. Hosted by Turkey and championed by Afghanistan, the Istanbul Conference will help build a common regional vision for peace and stability. The Conference will recognize Afghanistan's quest for stability, as well as the region's growing need for confidence-building and cooperation in the face of the common challenges we face, notably terrorism, extremism, the drug trade and obstacles to legitimate interaction and movement, to name but a few.

"Over the past 10 years, we have undertaken numerous initiatives to promote regional cooperation, mainly with a view to trade and economic activities. However, we have learned that unless we boldly address our political differences and the deficit of trust and confidence that divides the region, regional cooperation will remain an aspiration. It is for that very reason that at the Istanbul Conference we will aim to focus on political and security issues.

"In the coming weeks, we will expect to consult with all countries in the Heart of Asia region to develop a common understanding in the run-up to the Conference.

"In today's interconnected world, developments in Afghanistan and the surrounding region are hugely influenced by events in the wider world. Therefore, we in Afghanistan are closely watching the situation in the Middle East. As a nation that has experienced war and destruction for many years, the eruption of violence in these countries fills us with anxiety. We are particularly concerned by the developments in Libya. We recognize the National Transitional Council as the legitimate Government of Libya. However, based on our own experience, we urge the brotherly Libyan nation to recall that the shortest route to peace will be through ensuring inclusivity and safeguarding the unity of the Libyan nation.

"The people of Afghanistan deeply sympathize with the plight of our brothers and sisters in Palestine. We reiterate our call for an immediate end to their suffering and the realization of their inalienable rights, including the right to an independent State. In this connection, we stand firmly behind the efforts aimed at Palestine's admission as a full Member of the United Nations. I hope that this year we will witness, with pride, the inclusion of Palestine as the 194th Member of the United Nations.

"The Afghan people also shared the pain of the loss experienced by the Japanese people when the natural disasters struck earlier this year. Japan is a longstanding friend of Afghanistan, and we are confident that this great nation will soon overcome the challenges of recovery.

"The Assembly is a manifestation of our collective will to stand together against the challenges that face human society and to realize the potential for a peaceful and prosperous world for all. Our gathering here is also a testimony to the valuable role that the United Nations plays in the realization of our collective will. I applaud the remarkable leadership that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has demonstrated in steering the United Nations in a direction where it can truly become an asset to a peaceful world.

"Finally, many countries from across the globe have stood in solidarity, over the past 10 years, with the Afghan people. On behalf of the people of Afghanistan, I again thank them for their support."

The meeting rose at 9 p.m.